



AmeriCorps State Formula
Grant Review Interview
Meeting Minutes

AARP Conference Room
30 West 14th Street Suite 301, Helena, MT
May 25 and 26, 2011

May 25th 2011

Attendees

Grant review workgroup: James Steele, Karin Olsen-Billings, Bob Harris, Adam Vauthier, Tim McCauley (outside reviewer)

Staff: Jan Lombardi, Tony Dean, Rebecca Steele, Jim Auer, Julia Gustafson

Public Attendees: Ken Soderberg, Chas Van Genderen, Sarah Sadowski, Jake West, Michelle Hauer, Alison Paul, Jan Fontaine, Lee Gault, Jono McKinney, Alicia Vanderheiden, Ann Schwend, Nicole McClain, Todd Hunkler, Kathy Hadley

8:30 Welcome – Jan Lombardi

- Bob Harris Commented that in the past funding levels had been significantly lower than what was allocated this year.
 - Jan Lombardi offered that cuts at the competitive level are affecting formula funding this grant cycle consequently a tight funding situation exists
 - Bob Harris inquired as to the possibility of adjusting the level of federal funding requested by applicants.
 - Rebecca Steele confirmed that adjusting funding levels is an option the review committee can take advantage of

9:00 Process Reminders Rebecca Steele

- Outlines the process for review, scoring points scale, and the role of lead reviewers
- No potential conflicts of interest were stated by any member of the review committee

9:20 – 9:35 Big Sky Watershed Corps – Lee Gault & Alicia Vanderheiden

- Presentation – Project has been 2 and a half years in planning, requesting 10 MSY, 10.5 month term of service, cite 3 proven models utilizing AmeriCorps

9:35 Lead Reviewer Summary of Application - Adam Vauthier

- Program is operating under the MCC umbrella, show good outreach and volunteer plan, demonstrates good key partnerships, program demonstrates a clear structure, connects watersheds to community

9:40 Questions

- Adam Vauthier – How will the program approach ensuring a diverse member group
 - Alicia Vanderheiden – through university and other partners; take a view that diversity is a central part of the program, not a separate piece to be addressed
 - Lee Gault – this program will be more able to cater to persons with disabilities than MCC

- Tim McCauley – Site selection seems to be primarily related to the availability of funds, is this the case?
 - Alicia Vanderheiden – initially yes, but funds are being sought to offset the cost of members for less well funded host sites
- Tim McCauley – Is there any baseline data to show the improvement this program proposes to make?
 - Alicia Vanderheiden – baseline varies greatly among sites
- Tim McCauley – Can you speak to the sustainability of this program
 - Lee Gault – The programs sustainability will largely be dependent on funding
- Tim McCauley – What is the legal structure of watershed groups
 - Alicia Vanderheiden – Mostly 501(c)(3)s, some are tightly organized non-legal entities. MOUs in this case are not all legally binding per se, but more written commitments to participate in the program

9:50 Scoring Discussion and Consensus

- Review group discussion
 - Not all sites have MOUs, but many are lined up to commit to the program
 - Draws heavily on MCC's experience
 - Detail lacking of diversity efforts
 - Local approach to solving problems appreciated
 - Evidence provided for ability to generate volunteers
 - Sustainability of the project could be a challenge, but the initiative seems strong enough to continue without CNCS funding

11:00 Lead Reviewer Announces Final Score

- Adam Vauthier – Announces final score of 87.6 of 100

11:05 Fish Wildlife and Parks – Ken Soderberg & Chas Van Genderen

- Identity of State parks within FWP
- Have greatly increase volunteer engagement in parks, but will utilize AmeriCorps for the next step in volunteer and community engagement
- Building strong parks is key to Montana communities

11:20 Lead Reviewer Summary of Application – Tim McCauley

- Narrow funding source could be a challenge
- Program cites specifically how volunteerism will be increased
- Seek to increase awareness and education through parks

11:25 Questions

- James Steele – you cite a tribal contact list can you explain more?
 - Ken Soderberg – this is a recruitment site list, includes tribal colleges and other Native organizations
- James Steele – How will this program operate in the less frequented parks
 - Ken Soderberg & Chas Van Genderen – Site selection was primarily based on conversations with site managers identifying needs and assessing how AmeriCorps

members can be used to address these needs. Less frequented parks are most in need of AmeriCorps members

- Adam Vauthier – Provide further explanation of the needs assessment conducted
 - Ken Soderberg – looked at each park individually and identified needs to assess if AmeriCorps was a solution for each location.
- Adam Vauthier – What are the other community partners involved in this project?
 - Ken Soderberg – Friends of Parks organizations
 - Chas Van Genderen – State Parks is continually working to develop partnerships with like minded organizations including historical sites
- Bob Harris – does State Parks have experience working with federal grants/
 - Chas Van Genderen – over 40 year administering fed grants and lots of experience as grantees
 - Bob Harris – and have there have been issues in managing these grants
 - Chas Van Genderen – all grants are in good status
- Karin Billings – Have you examined other funding sources related to childhood obesity
 - Chas Van Genderen – Yes, but no funds have been made available to date

11:35 Scoring Discussion and Consensus

- More information on the funding of the program is needed
- Committee asked OCS staff to clarify on issues in the planning grant regarding spending down federal funds and match requirements.
 - Jim Auer – State Parks initiated the conversation with OCS to brainstorm spending remaining funds, match is behind, but only very slightly so.
- More data to illustrate need would strengthen application
- Better explanation of less than full time member roles is needed
- Diversity training and overall member management strategy is strong
- Impact measures could be strengthened
- Sustainability of the program without CNCS funds is strong as presented
- More specific information on special circumstances section is needed
- Other sources of funds need to be clarified

1:00 Lead Reviewer Announces Final Score

- Final score 66.7 of 100

1:00 Break

1:10 St. Vincent's April Keippel & Heather Fink via phone conference

- Focus on nutrition education, tobacco/suicide prevention, trauma/injury prevention, preventative/primary care, and senior health education

1:25 Lead Reviewer Summary of Application- James Steele

- Application represents good starting point, needs more focus
- Provide a good list of partners and match sources
- Greater connection to AmeriCorps needed

1:30 Questions

- Bob Harris – Explain the changes in funding level requested between initial documents and the final application?
 - Partners were dropped and added for a number of reasons, the large addition was the Salvation Army of Billings
- Tim McCauley – how will this program engage rural communities while being primarily Billings based?
 - The St. Vincent’s network will be used to reach rural communities, outreach has been a tradition at the hospital
- Adam Vauthier – how would you assess the sustainability of the program?
 - It would likely not exist without AmeriCorps

1:40 Scoring Discussion and Consensus

- Responses to many questions were limited
- Project may be too large in scope
- List of training topics for members is needed
- Overall evaluation plans are weak

2:50 Lead Reviewer Announces Final Score

- Final Score 54.7 of 100

3:00 Energy Corps – Kathy Hadley & Todd Hunkler

- Presented continuation grant proposal with key points and photos of members and projects.

3:15 Lead Reviewer Summary of Application

- Adam Vauthier talked about the overall success of the program and added that some of the questions were not addressed in the application.

3:20 Questions

- Adam Vauthier – What have you learned or determined regarding the AmeriCorps grants.
 - Kathy Hadley- We have learned that the recruitment and paperwork take a lot of staff time and resources.
- Bob Harris – What happened to including Montana in the National Direct application?
 - Kathy Hadley- We were not successful this year due to tight funding.
- Tim McCauley – If federal funds were eliminated would the program be sustainable?
 - Kathy Hadley – This would depend on the community being able to find an individual(s) to fill the void. Members are asked to develop a sustainability plan for the host sites.

3:30 Scoring Discussion and Consensus

- Grant review workgroup found items that were not addressed in the narrative regarding the budget.

4:00 Lead Reviewer Announces Final Score

- Final score – 48 out of 100

2:20 Break

4:13 Justice for Montanans – Alison Paul & Michelle Hauer

- Talked about increased capacity of help-line hours and ability to serve more clients.
- Program overview is to advocate for Montanans

4:25 Lead Reviewer Summary of Application

- Bob Harris gave an overview of the project and accomplishments to date.
- Good program with meaningful results
- Questioned whether there was more room for in-kind match
- Questioned the possibility of funding cuts to court system affecting the program

4:30 Questions

- Tim McCauley – Do members receive space in county buildings and if so is this match counted?
 - Alison Paul – Yes, several members have offices in county buildings but county officials have a difficult time tracking this data.
- Tim McCauley – If federal funds were eliminated would the program be sustainable?
 - Alison Paul – Impact would be felt mostly in rural areas and numbers served would decrease overall. The type of service is not something that can be provided by a recorded phone message, need real bodies to perform.

4:34 Scoring Discussion and Consensus

- Need to better explain budget increases within application
- More information needed on plans to increase match
- Enrollment has significantly improved since year 1

4:48 Lead Reviewer Announces Final Score

- Final score 86 out of 100

4:50 Lead Reviewer Summary of Application

- Karin Olsen Billings – discussed the status of their competitive application that was submitted and is up for consideration.

4:55 Young Adult Service Corps – Sarah Sadowski

- Overview of project and accomplishments including challenges that they are having with high travel costs due to the rural locations of members. They continue to receive support from host sites and will be able to increase their matching funds as a result.
- 23.28 MSY at \$5,724 per MSY total CNCS budget requested of \$133,252
- Shifting from opportunity focus area to education

5:10 Questions

- Tim McCauley – Asked if they could clarify what changes will be made to their performance measures.
- Sarah Sadowski – moved from opportunity to education

5:20 Public Comment

- No public comments were added.

5:20 Closing

- Final scores
 - New Applicants: Big Sky Watershed Corps – 87.6, Fish Wildlife and Parks - 66.7, St. Vincent's – 54.37
 - Continuation: Young Adult Service Corps – 99, Justice for Montanans – 86.7, Energy Corps - 48

May 26th 2011

Attendees

Grant review workgroup: James Steele, Karin Olsen-Billings, Bob Harris, Adam Vauthier, Tim McCauley (outside reviewer)

Staff: Jan Lombardi, Tony Dean, Rebecca Steele, Jim Auer

Public Attendees: Ken Soderberg, Connie Roope, Jake West, Michelle Hauer, Jan Fontaine

9:00 Jan Lombardi – Welcome

- Funding cuts at the federal level making all grant making decisions more competitive this year and everyone needs to respond
 - MCC funded through the competitive process as their request
 - Campus Corps funded through the competitive process at a reduced level
 - New national planning grant in Montana
- Focus on expanding into areas of the state where AmeriCorps does not currently have a presence while maintaining current programs integrity
- Focus on math, science, and outdoor education as the Governor and First Ladies priorities
- Recommendations based on funding level, scores, and state service plan
- Tony Dean Commented on the current funding situation both from Montana and the nation being extremely tight this year with very few expansions approved.

9:15 Rebecca Steele Process Reminders

9:20 Rebecca Steele presented the staff recommendation for funding

- Young Adult Service Corps at \$131,750 level funding to 2010
- Reducing funding to Justice for Montanans to \$146,300 allowing for a minimum of 11 MSY
- Reducing Energy Corps funding to \$106,400 allowing a minimum of 8 MSY
- Funding Big Sky Watershed Corps, and Fish Wildlife and Parks AmeriCorps at \$106,400 each allowing 8 MSY minimum per program.
- St. Vincent's Healthcare Healthy futures was not selected to receive formula funding for the 2011 grant year
- Tim McCauley inquired as to the affect reduced funding would have on a programs required match.
 - Rebecca Steele – explained that match is calculated as a percentage and would reduce with the funding level
- Karin Olsen-Billings Inquired on the large reduction to Young Adult Service Corps
 - Rebecca Steele Explained that the cut is from the requested amount, and the funding amount is equal to what the program received for the 2010 program year
- Tony Dean – discussed supplementary funds that may be available from CNCS

10:00 The review committee requested that applicants present at this meeting be allowed to comment on the funding recommendations of OCS Staff

- Michelle Hauer of Justice for Montanans (JFM) commented that there would be a reduction to the number of AmeriCorps members in their program, but that overall the program would continue to be able to operate effectively. In regard to reduced

member slots JFM would likely retain members in the rural Eastern and Northern areas of the state

- Connie Roope of the Young Adult Service Corps (YASC) commented that remaining at their 2010 funding level would not have an impact on their current operations but would postpone any plans for expansion. Particular to postponing expansion plans to target more efforts in tribal areas and OPI Schools of Promise may suffer.
- Jan Fontaine representing Big Sky Watershed Corps (BSWC) could not speak directly to how reduced MSY would be handled by the program, but commented that they would gladly accept the funding level presented in the staff recommendation.
- Ken Soderberg representing Fish Wildlife and Parks AmeriCorps (FWP) commented that they would re-assess member placement given reduced slots, but that the funding would be sufficient to run an effective program.
- James Steele introduced the concept of requesting supplemental funds for St. Vincent's proposal
 - The Grant Review Committee, through discussion, decided that potential for a strong and needed program existed but that the project as proposed in the application needed to be tighter and more focus, that plans to reach rural communities and partner with the Salvation Army project seemed overly ambitious.
- Kathy Hadley of Energy Corps addressed the committee via speakerphone as to the funding recommendation for their program. Kathy stated that they would adapt the program to work with 8 MSY while maintaining their focus in rural areas.
- The review committee agrees to accept the staff funding recommendation and proceed to the discussion of the supplemental funds and their potential allocation.
 - Tony Dean presented the staff recommendation to request supplemental funds to increase JFM funding the level of 2010 with a secondary priority to increase funding to FWP and BAWC to the level of requested.
 - Following discussion the review committee agrees to accept the staff recommendation and to add to a third priority to the supplemental request that would fund YASC at the level of funding for their 2011 competitive request.

11:00 Final Ranking and Recommendations

11:15 Full Commission Meeting Overview

- June 10th 2011
- Summit Net

11:20 Public Comment

- Thanks to the Grant Review Workgroup for the diligent work during the formula funding process.

11:30 Close Meeting

Contact:

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